

## Resources You Can Use

*The Philosophy of Kalam* by Harry A. Wolfson. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 779 pages, 1976.

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The development of Islamic ethical thought took many hundreds of years but is embodied in the Quran (The Islamic Book of Divine Revelation). From the Quran and *Hadith* (Prophet Muhammad's recorded sayings and deeds) come three distinct disciplines. The first is *tafseer* (Quranic interpretations and applications), the second is *fiqh* (distilling both works into a codified set of law—the word literally means “jurisprudence”) and the final discipline is *kalam* (free-flowing theological discourse). This book, although dated, provides the English speaker the best description of *kalam*. It combines the work of great Islamic philosophic giants, like Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khuldun and Ibn Sina. (Many Western historians have typically given these thinkers Western names like Ibn Sina is Avicenna. )

Ibn Khuldun lived in the fourteenth century and advocated the concept of argumentation formed by intellect. He encouraged the discussion of differences in opinion in matters of faith, and even backed this practice with the Islamic concept of *qiyas* (deductive reasoning and analogy). The word *kalam* literally means “speech,” and its impact on Islamic thought is profound.

The author relates how Muslims translated and preserved the works of Aristotle and Plato and applies them to Islamic thought. The ninth century scholar Hayyat Nazzam presented a thesis that contrasted Aristotle's concepts of nature with the Quranic doctrine of creationism. Sadly, Islamic militants, ignorant of their own history and philosophy, have often suppressed such discourse. (A modern example of this involves Egyptian Islamic Professor Abu-Zeid who has written extensively about the historical context of Quranic revelations and the Prophet's sayings. His scholarship was rewarded with death threats, an obscene court case and exile in the Netherlands.) This is not an easy book and is certainly not for those newly studying the religion. Nonetheless, *The Philosophy of Kalam* is an important English-language book on this subject.

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be shared with your colleagues?

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